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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001495

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: BASQUE ELECTIONS: ETA SUPPORTERS GAIN SEATS

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¶11. (U) The moderate Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) won its eighth straight regional election, but lost four seats in the 75-seat Basque Parliament to the radical leftist Communist Party of the Basque Lands (EHAK), which had the explicit support of ETA front-group Batasuna. The Marxist-Leninist EHAK was founded in 2002 and was not a factor in the 2005 Basque elections until Batasuna threw its support behind EHAK after the Spanish government barred another ETA front group from participating in the vote (see reftel). Zapatero will face intense criticism from the PP for his government's failure to impede EHAK's participation in the election (as the PP urged), a decision which resulted in increased political power for ETA front organizations.

¶12. (U) Overall, however, the election was a victory for Zapatero. The Basque wing of the Socialist Party (PSOE) gained five seats, mostly at the expense of the Popular Party (PP), and the combined strength of the PP and PSOE now places them one vote ahead of the PNV/United Left (EB-IU) coalition in the Basque Parliament. The erosion of support for the PNV is seen as a repudiation of its plan to seek near-independence from Madrid, both by moderates who view it as too extreme and by nationalist radicals who seek outright secession from Spain.

//ELECTION RESULTS//

¶13. (U) 2005 Basque Parliamentary Election results:

PNV -- 29 Seats -- 463,873 votes -- 38.6 percent of the vote

PSOE -- 18 Seats -- 272,429 votes -- 22.6 percent of the vote

PP -- 15 Seats -- 208,795 votes -- 17.3 percent of the vote

EHAK -- 9 Seats -- 150,188 votes -- 12.5 percent of the vote

EB-IU -- 3 Seats -- 64,000 votes -- 5.4 percent of the vote

ARALAR -- 1 Seat -- 28,001 votes -- 2.3 percent of the vote

NOTE: Aralar is a former ETA front group that has denounced terrorism, but remains allied to leftist nationalist positions.

The following 2001 Basque Parliamentary Election results are provided for comparison:

PNV -- 33 Seats -- 604,222 votes -- 42.7 percent of the vote

PP -- 19 Seats -- 326,933 votes -- 23.1 percent of the vote

PSOE -- 13 Seats -- 253,195 votes -- 17.9 percent of the vote

EB-IU -- 3 Seats -- 78,862 votes -- 5.5 percent of the vote

EH -- 7 Seats -- 143,139 votes -- 10.1 percent of the vote

NOTE: EH was the ETA front-group banned from political activity in 2003 under Spain's "Law of Political Parties."

//TOUGH CHOICES FOR MODERATE BASQUE NATIONALISTS//

¶14. (SBU) The electoral setback leaves the PNV with three unpalatable options:

A) Lead with a weakened coalition, seeking temporary alliances when necessary;

B) Seek an alliance with the Socialist Party (the PSOE would insist on limiting PNV moves towards independence);

C) Seek an alliance with the radical nationalist EHAK (opening the PNV to accusations that it tolerates ETA violence).

Most observers expect the PNV to go with the first option and forge ahead with a weakened PNV/IU-EB coalition, at least for the moment. However, Zapatero and the PSOE have given clear indications that they are open to a renegotiation of the existing Basque Autonomy Statute, though strictly within the limits set by the Spanish constitution. This sets the PSOE apart from the PP, which rejects any increase in Basque autonomy. Over time, the PNV may be tempted to drop its alliance with smaller leftist nationalist in favor of a coalition with the PSOE, especially if the Socialists continue to support moderate Basque nationalist objectives. This alliance would come at some cost to both the PNV and the PSOE; for the PNV because a coalition with the Socialists would imply acceptance of rule from Madrid and irritate its Basque nationalist base, and for the PSOE because the majority of the Spanish electorate resents Basque nationalists and would view a PSOE/PNV coalition as Socialist political opportunism.

MANZANARES